Suffolk Design

Current Approaches
To Design Guidance

Topic Paper

2

CURRENT APPROACHES TO DESIGN GUIDANCE

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1 SUMMARY

This topic paper assesses design guidance in the UK and Europe to better understand the approaches in use for affecting change within the built environment. It also involves examining guidance from outside of the built environment, to see if lessons from other industries can be brought into the Suffolk Design project to make it more affective in delivering the desired outcomes.

The research shows that design guides fall into distinct categories, with a trend towards on-line and web-based guidance and sign-posting to bring wider information to users. Comprehensiveness for design guides often comes at the expense of ease of use, and guides that cover wide geographical areas are often light on analysis. Many of the guides repeat core principles that apply equally to anywhere, which is probably better dealt with through signposting rather than through repeating what is written elsewhere.

All guidance examined has a vision of what it was trying to achieve. Case studies, examples and diagrams are used across the range of guides examined, although not all of the examples within the guides are local to the area the guide covers. Missing from the UK guides is much information on sustainability, and future technology modern methods of construction are likely to be areas that the Suffolk Design project will need to address.

Some of the guides examined manage to work at both a country and local level through taking generic principles and then focussing in on a place-by-place basis to provide local guidance. Over time, a 'live' Suffolk Design project could add this kind of in-depth guidance as it becomes available.

Finally, the more modern design guides integrate design initiatives such as quality panels and kite marks, helping to embed good design at a range of points in the planning development process.

2 INTRODUCTION;PURPOSE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

THE AIM OF THE SUFFOLK DESIGN PROJECT IS ULTIMATELY TO DELIVER BETTER-QUALITY DESIGN FOR THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT.

There are many components to achieving this outcome, and understanding where to focus resources is critical if the project is to be successful. The key to this is identifying which components offer the best, and most cost-effective opportunity for positive influence. The components under examination in this paper are:

Process: The degree to which the guidance sets out the processes that should lead to the desired outcomes. This includes aspects such as engagement with stakeholders external to the design team, 'how to' guidance around specific tasks or problems, and identifying 'paths', 'steps', and 'stages' to producing a design outcome.

Analysis: The level of information provided within the guidance intended to help the user embed existing knowledge and understanding into their design process and solution. This could be in the form of assessments of places or issues, sign-posting across available information, or through providing 'baseline' information at specific stages.

Direction: The degree to which the guidance tells users what to do. This could be in the form of expected outcomes, or through suggesting specific solutions to certain issues or problems, or by providing preliminary design solutions for a specific project.

In preparing this paper, the methodology used three distinct steps:

One: to produce preliminary analysis on a wide range of guidance across both the built environment and other design sectors to identify common themes and to develop a classification system to categorise types of design guidance.

Two: to select representative examples from each of the categorised guidance types and conduct a more in-depth review to form a series of case studies.

Three: To develop and implement a system that rates various aspects of the guidance analysed for its focus and purpose. This relates to the three key traits for the guidance mentioned above: process, direction, and analysis.

The paper concludes with a discussion on which aspects of the guidance examined are most likely to affect change on the ground. Finally, key lessons are set out for the Suffolk Design project going forward.

3 DESIGN GUIDANCE TODAY; A SNAPSHOT OF CURRENT PRACTICE

This section examines a range of design guidance documents from both the built environment and other disciplines. It seeks to identify commonalities and to develop 'categories' or types of guidance based on how they written. In selecting which documents to review, a simple web search was conducted using the search string 'design guide'.

What is initially striking at this point is that the first page of returned searches comprises mainly design guides for the built environment. The subsequent four pages are much the same, with the highest-ranking results adopted policy of either Local Planning Authorities or bodies involved with managing other aspects of the built environment. The term 'design guide' is not often applied to processes or documents outside of disciplines concerned with either designing or managing places.

By far the most common type of design guides is adopted SPDs from Local Planning Authorities. These make up the bulk available design guidance, with highways guidance included here. The next most represented category for design guidance relates to design in National Parks and other areas of high landscape quality. Reading these reveals a concentration of a common language around design and the built environment, although it is debatable as to how appealing to users this is.

Widening the sample to include a wide range of creative industries, you find that most of these types of design guides can be bundled as those concerned with either graphic design or digital user interface design. The language within guides for other industries is in generally less formal than that of the planning and built environment, possibly due to the way design guidance often performs a legal role beyond simply its primary purpose.

How the information is presented is relatively consistent, with most being written as linear documents for print. This means they follow a simple structure, where a sequential reading of the information from front to back is required. Less common, but potentially more user-friendly and streamlined are guides that have been designed at the outset to work via a web interface. With this kind of guide, it is possible for users to 'curate' their experience of the guide by navigating to only the parts of it they need. This allows people to skip sections that are not relevant to their project or interests.

TABLE 1:
THEMES IN EXISTING UK RESIDENTIAL DESIGN GUIDANCE

	Preamble			Analysis and Direction					Process			
	Vision statement / purpose	How to use	Sets out policy context	Provides place-specific analysis	Sets out expected design stages	Explains how to undertake design stages	Provides examples or case studies	Uses metrics or technical specifications	Signposts to other sources	Explains engagement / application	Provides a glossary / index	Provides proformas
Sustainable Housing Design Guide, Cambridge	●							●	●	●	●	
Residential Design Guide, Warwick District Council	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●			
Our Place, North West Leicestershire	●	●	●		●		●	●	●			
Residential Development; A Design Guide, Bournemouth DC	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Design Guide for New Residential Areas, Glasgow CC	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●
Residential Design Guide, South Yorkshire	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Successful Places, Bolsover District Council	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●			
Frequency:	7/7	5/7	6/7	2/7	6/7	5/7	6/7	7/7	7/7	3/7	4/7	1/7

TABLE 2:
THEMES IN EXISTING WIDER AREA DESIGN GUIDANCE

	Preamble			Analysis and Direction					Process			
	Vision statement / purpose	How to use	Sets out policy context	Provides place-specific analysis	Sets out expected design stages	Explains how to undertake design stages	Provides examples or case studies	Uses metrics or technical specifications	Signposts to other sources	Explains engagement / application	Provides a glossary / index	Provides proformas
Councillors Guide to Urban Design	●		●				●		●		●	
Active Design, Sport England	●	●	●				●		●		●	●
Mini Holland Design Guide, Waltham Forrest	●			●			●	●				
Building for Life 12, Design for Homes	●	●	●		●			●	●		●	●
Essex Design Guide, Essex	●		●	●			●	●	●			
Design for Ebbsfleet, Ebbsfleet DC	●	●	●	●			●	●				
Cornwall Design Guide, Cornwall Council	●				●	●	●		●	●		
Surrey Design Guide, Surrey County Council	●			●			●		●		●	
North Herefordshire Design Guide, Hertz	●		●	●			●		●		●	
Frequency:	9/9	3/9	6/9	5/9	2/9	1/9	8/9	4/9	7/9	1/9	5/9	2/9

TABLE 3:
INTERNATIONAL DESIGN GUIDANCE

	Preamble			Analysis and Direction					Process			
	Vision statement / purpose	How to use	Sets out policy context	Provides place-specific analysis	Sets out expected design stages	Explains how to undertake design stages	Provides examples or case studies	Uses metrics or technical specifi-cations	Signposts to other sources	Explains engage-ment / application	Provides a glossary / index	Provides proformas
Residential Design Codes of Western Australia	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Residential Design Guide, Town of Hillsborough, CA	●		●	●			●	●				
Meath Rural Housing Design Guide	●			●			●	●	●			

4 INITIAL FINDINGS; COMMONALITIES AND TYPES

The initial sample analysis finds that all Design Guides set out their purpose, and a significant majority explain both how to use them and how they related to the wider planning policy context. Comparatively fewer provide place-specific analysis within the actual document, but some signpost to this kind of supporting work. It appears that justification for this is that providing geographically specific guidance at the detailed level is at odds with the area the Guide is trying to cover, which is often significant. The notable exception to this is the guidance for Ebbsfleet, which uses a 'place first' approach to its structure.

Beyond this, a clear distinction starts to emerge; within the sample, there are a group of Guides that set out the expected design process and support this with an explanation of how to undertake each of these steps, and those that provide the design information directly. It should be noted that many of the Guides that do not set out a design process still use examples of how a design team might demonstrate that they have undertaken a certain task (e.g. site analysis). All Guides address a range of core principles, many of which are the same across geographical areas. The Guides samples range in length from around 60 pages to around 250.

The use of diagrams is common, and most use photographs to support these, although not all photographs used are from the locality. The language and tone of the guidance is quite different across the sample; some are written in dense, technical language more commonly associated with adopted planning policy, whereas others are more conversational, aimed more at the end user external to the issuing body.

The difference in style is potentially telling; Guides written primarily for planners could be viewed as being defensive, arming decision makers for confrontation with design teams. Those written for an external audience could be more likely to foster a collaborative approach to design, bringing external stakeholders into the vision for the place.

4.1 INITIAL FINDINGS; SELECTING CASE STUDIES

Having assessed a wide range of guides, a representative sample is selected for more in-depth analysis. Each of these is developed into a case study, with key lessons for Suffolk Design identified. The Guides chosen are:

Guide	Key Features	Relevance to Suffolk Design
Residential Design Guide, South Yorkshire	Comprehensive, long, detailed	Works across multiple settlements
Residential Development; A Design Guide, Bournemouth City	Place-specific, provides analysis, technical	Urban focussed, so useful to Ipswich
Our Place, North West Leicestershire	Short and punchy, explains how not what to think	Highly portable across Local Planning Authorities
Essex Design Guide, Essex	Web-based, county-wide	More modern way of interacting with design guidance
Design for Ebbsfleet, Ebbsfleet DC	Highly spatial, lots of analysis, web-based	User curates their own experience based on location
Meath Rural Housing Design Guide, Meath County Council, Ir	International, rural focus, highly directional	Sets out expectations for rural locations
North Hertfordshire Design Guide, North Hertfordshire	County-wide, but with place-specific guidance	Works at a number of scales, offers analysis at the settlement level
Building for Life 12, BFL Partnership	Uses a reward system, easy to use	Promotes process as well as design

5 CASE STUDY 1;
RESIDENTIAL DESIGN GUIDE, SOUTH YORKSHIRE

The Design Guide produced for South Yorkshire is an extremely comprehensive and detailed Guide, addressing design issues at all scales and including a huge amount of technical information.

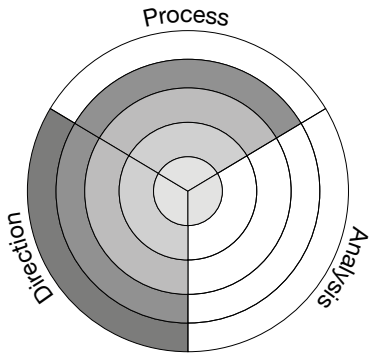
It integrates main principles with a series of questions based on BfL12. This is supported by an entire section on technical street design and a list of specific landscaping to be used. Place-specific analysis is not dealt with at length in the document, but is signposted.

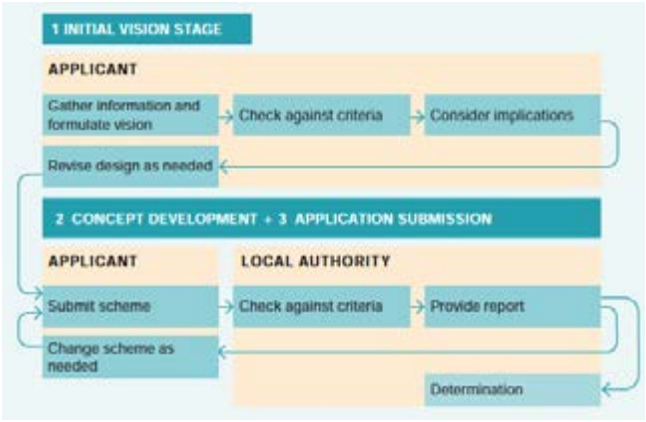
The document runs to around 250 pages and is therefore unlikely to be attractive to the casual reader. However, the way the document is structured means that users can skip sections that are not relevant to their project. It is particularly strong on this element, which could translate well for the Suffolk Design project.

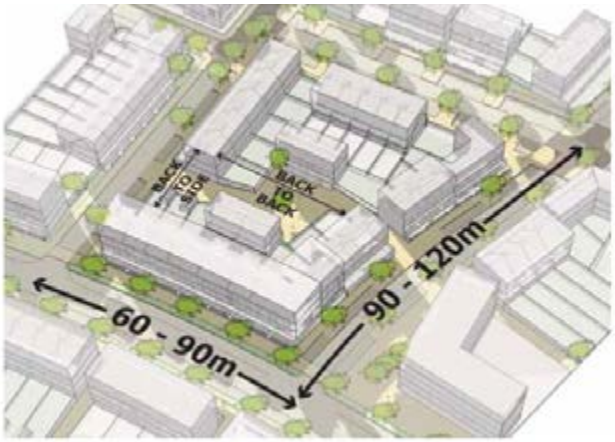
The diagrams used are clear and well-annotated, although with the photographs it is less easy to pick up on the principle being explained. The example tasks shown make it clear to potential applicants what is expected of them should they submit a design proposal.

There is potentially an issue with this kind of guidance in that something this dense and technical cannot be 'live' in any sense, as the various sections are highly interdependent and any changes would require a fair amount of work.

For Suffolk Design, it is likely that the wide scope of information within this guide already exists and could be sign-posted instead of set out in one place, which would help solve some of the usability issues this guide presents.







A key to making best use of the perimeter block and maintaining space standards is to

- Comprehensive
- Explains process
- Good examples
- Extremely long

6 CASE STUDY 2;
RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT: A GUIDE BOURNEMOUTH CITY

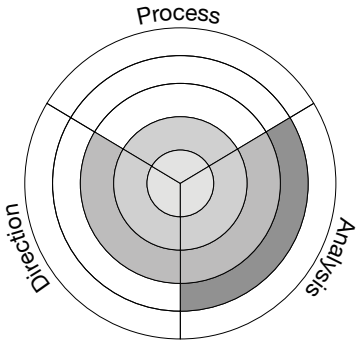
The Bournemouth City Guide has covers a limited geographical area and as such, provides more place-specific guidance than many of the other guides within this sample. Unlike many of the other guides, this document is less focussed on process, although it does issue a set of 'key watch points', setting out expectations from designers. It also has tables setting out exact requirements for certain design situations, which is more prescriptive than most design guides in the UK and more in line with those used abroad.

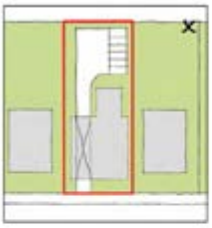
The document is more compact than many of the Guides in the sample, running to 88 pages. In many respects it reads more like a design code than a Guide, setting out mandatory design responses with metrics. In general, it is simple to understand, but how the various components work together is less obvious than in other documents.

The simple diagrams express key design requirements clearly, and most of the photographs are well-captioned so that their design messages are conveyed.

The arrangement of information is handled well, with a single page used for each aspect of detailed design being covered. By working more like a design code, the guide takes a lot of the guess work out of design. This may come at the cost of innovation, so a balance has to be struck.

For Suffolk Design, it may be appropriate to use very detailed place-specific guidelines or signpost to them where needed. More urban settings with constrained sites such as those in Ipswitch may be an example of this.





The layout of this replacement scheme steps forward of the building line, introduces rear car parking and a larger built form.

3.8 Built form

Objective: Ensure the three dimensional block form is right for the circumstances.

The proposed built form can have the biggest impact on the character of the area and the amenities of local residents. The resulting built form results from a combination of height, depth, width and roof form.

A site and context analysis will identify design cues, such as building heights, building depths, plot widths and roof shapes, that should influence the form and massing of new buildings.

For modest infill or backland development on small sites (less than 0.5ha) this will usually involve development of a scale directly comparable to that in the immediate surroundings. On larger sites or those situated in a area of particularly weak character there may be the opportunity to experiment with more innovative built forms.

The proposed built form should:

- Reflect the scale, height, bulk and mass of the site context;
- Reflect the roof forms characteristic in the street; providing variety to the roof line and form is generally only appropriate where variation in the roof form is already characteristic in the area;
- Follow the plot width and building depth of adjoining buildings to avoid a massive appearance.

Clear design led justification will be required to accompany proposals for increased building form. The need to achieve a pre determined quantum of development is not considered adequate justification.

Short and compact

Focussed

Very prescriptive

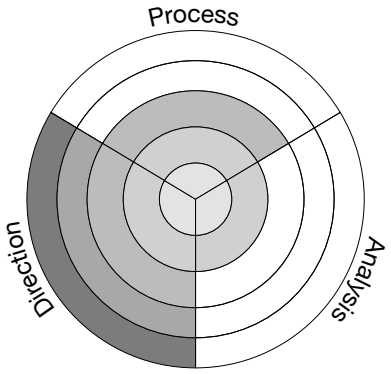
7 CASE STUDY 3;
OUR PLACE: NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE

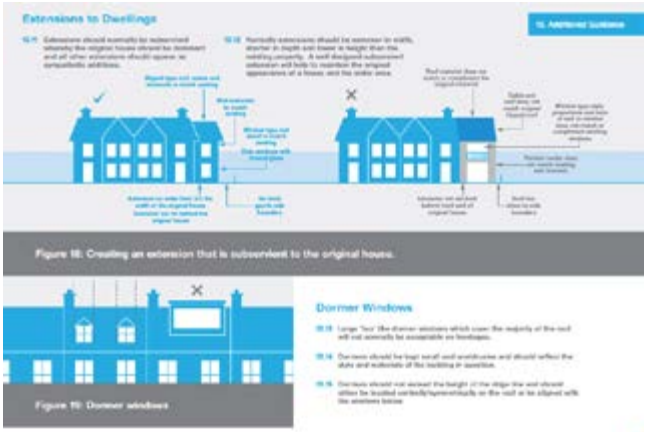
The Our Place Guide is the most directive of the Guides assessed, with most of the text explaining how to think rather than what to think. As such, it manages to be a short, punchy document at 66 pages. This comes at the expense of much by way of place-specific analysis. That said, the setting of the National Forrest is highlighted as a key design consideration for designers, and tips on how to use the forest setting are included.

The document uses more photographs than the other Guides in the sample, and the diagrams are bold and crisp. As a desktop publishing exercise, this Guide looks the most modern, and is not as obviously focussed on decision making in the planning process as other Guides. Instead it is written to appeal to designers first and foremost, with the document its self showcasing good design.

The guidance on developing design proposals is clear and easy to use, so designers know what is expected of them.

For Suffolk Design, the balance of generic design guidance and reference to the landscape setting is something to consider given that much of the character of Suffolk is derived from the natural environment. Here, cross-referencing existing studies could help in adding in this kind of detail.





- Comprehensive
- Explains process
- Good examples
- Extremely long

8 CASE STUDY 4;
DESIGN FOR EBBSFLEET, EBBSFLEET DC

The Design for Ebbsfleet guide takes a very different approach to how it tackles design issues than the other documents examined here.

It is highly spatial, using the concept of 'design narratives' to explain why one area should be designed differently to another, and then layers that with specific design details. It covers a reasonably small geographical area but within this area are distinct zones of character.

The way it approaches each of these narratives combines both historic uses and useful analysis of underlying geology and landform. Together, these act as prompts for responding to the site and detailing the proposed design.

Design for Ebbsfleet is a new guide and as such has been developed to primarily work as a web-based project. A full version is available for download as a hyper-linked PDF, but this version loses the appeal and ease of use of the web version.

Core principles are not covered in the document, which helps keep it short and readable. The examples shown are bold and forward looking, which may not fit with the scope of Suffolk Design.

Being web-based means that this guide is 'live', and this is reinforced by each of the design narratives being self-contained, so updating one would not affect others. Also, the way the site is structured keeps the information 'shallow', so users do not have to click deep into the website to access what they need. This is a key lesson for Suffolk Design going forward.

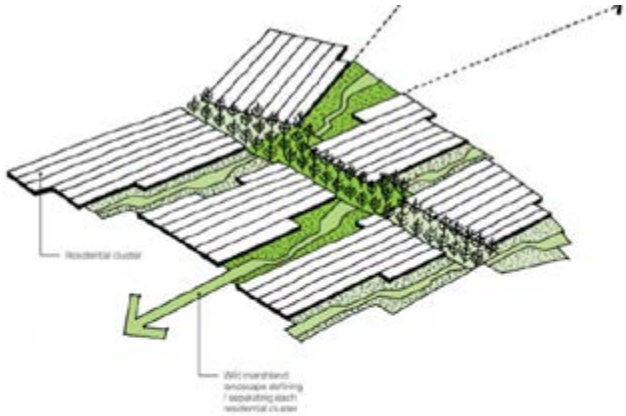
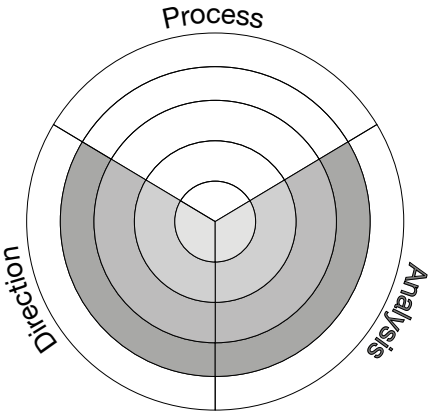


Diagram above illustrates the design principles for the Marsh design narrative.

URBAN FORM

'The Marsh' urban form has been derived from the structure patterns of the manorways which crossed the North Kent Marshes, and the defensive layouts of farm buildings within the marshland, such as those near Cliffe.



RIVER, MARSH AND CHALK CLIFFS

The diagram below shows the chalk cliffs in relation to: the water bodies; the Thames, the marshes, the remnants of the Ebbsfleet river and the lakes formed within the base of quarries; the private and public realm spaces across the Ebbsfleet area; and the chalk escarpments that have been created adjacent to existing settlements and rail and road corridors.

- Novel approach
- Place-specific
- Very clear
- Approach might not scale for Suffolk

9 CASE STUDY 5;
NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DESIGN GUIDE, HERTS

Another comprehensive design guide, the North Hertfordshire is long, dense and technical. It is faily hard to read and is not written in a way that is overly user-friendly, not helped by being wordy and cluttered on the page.

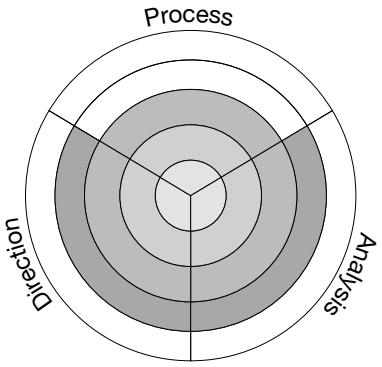
However, it does something interesting that could be of relevance to the Suffolk Design project; it sets out the range of settlement types found in the area and provides specific guidance based on this.

This makes it highly spatial and particularly suited to guiding new growth, especially for existing settlements. The combination of general design principles that apply anywhere and then specific analysis and direction for placing in the area covered by the guide means that only offers special or unique guidance when needed.

Being printed, this makes for a clumsy document that requires lots of cross-referencing. It is, however, quite old (2011), and whilst its current form is not ideal, the contents would translate well to a web-based platform, especially if maps were integrated.

For Suffolk Design, the advice on how to grow existing settlements is especially relevant as this is likely to be the kind of development pressure faced during the life of the project.

Also, the ability to offer both area-wide guidance and then zoom in for place-specific information offers a potential way of balancing the need to cover such a wide and diverse area with the need to say meaningful things about special areas etc.



Combined Heat and Power (CHP)
58. This is the simultaneous generation of useable heat and power (usually electricity) in a single process. These technologies are becoming more common in premises which have simultaneous need for heating and electricity for long periods, such as hospitals and hotels.

Ground Cooling
59. This uses the relatively constant ground temperature to provide summertime cooling through ground heat exchangers. These heat exchangers could either be air to ground or water to ground.

Ground Source Heat Pumps / Geothermal energy
60. This uses pipes buried in the garden to extract heat from the ground. This is usually used to warm water for radiators or underfloor heating systems. It can also be used to pre-heat water before it goes into a more conventional boiler.

Solar (photovoltaics)
70. These technologies convert sunlight to electricity and can be integrated into buildings. The tend to have no moving parts and are silent. They can be incorporated into buildings in various ways on sloped roofs, atria and shading devices.

Fig 6: Use of photovoltaics on roofs in Freiburg, Germany (Alex Ely: CABE)

Solar water heating
71. These systems use solar panels, called collectors, fitted to the roof of a building. These collect heat from the sun and use it to warm water which is stored in a hot water cylinder. This is a well established renewable system outside of the UK and is viewed as one of the most cost effective systems available.

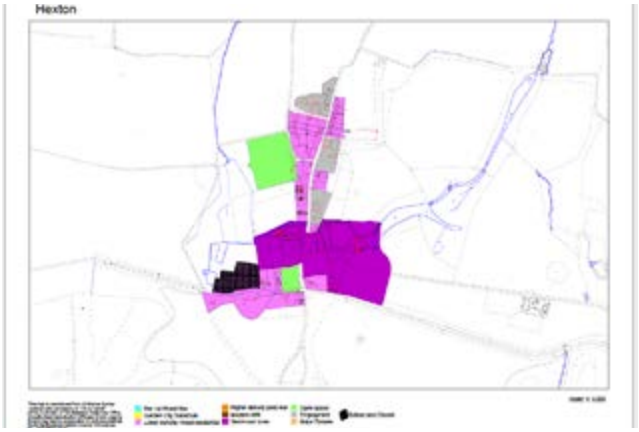
Wind
72. This is a successful and fast spreading renewable energy technology in the UK with the growing number of individual and group installations of varying size, capacity and location.

Use of Materials
73. The type of materials in any development is very important to its energy efficiency and can influence how efficient it is. The rate of heat transfer in buildings is measured by a "U value". The use of high thermal mass materials (such as concrete / stone / brick) can retain heat and improve energy efficiency. Insulation also has the same effect. The U-values listed in Building Regulations should be treated as a minimum requirement.

74. The use of locally sourced materials should be investigated to reduce the overall carbon footprint of developments, although the overall impact on design needs to be taken into account as local materials do not always fit with local character.

Waste Management
75. Developments should be designed with the future management of waste in mind and their layout should facilitate increased recycling. Sending waste to landfill should be viewed as the last resort and every effort should be made to reuse, reduce and recycle.

Energy Efficiency
76. The need to reduce the amount of energy used is tied into climate change and reduction of emissions. The more efficient something is the less resources it uses and the less waste is produced.



- Offers advice on growth
- Works at a range of scales
- Hard to read
- Too long

10 CASE STUDY 6; BUILDING FOR LIFE 12, BFL PARTNERSHIP

Building for Life 12 is a collaborative project between a consortium that includes house builders and is endorsed by Government.

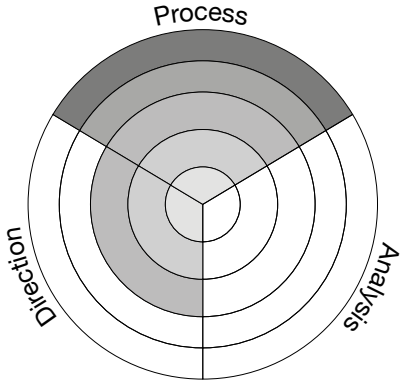
It uses a simple set of questions to encourage designers and decision-makers to interrogate designs, which includes the process by which designers can get good outcomes.

Given that BfL12 covers the entire country, it does not provide analysis or place-specific guidance. Conversely, by not being tied to any specific place allows the examples used in the document to be drawn from exemplars around the country.

BfL 12 is necessarily fairly generic, and to make it usable, it is very short and uses direct and accessible language. This adds a weakness as it requires designers to use other sources to fully explain principles, meaning it is not a one-stop-shop for design. However, the advantage of this is that core principles and expectations are expressed simply.

Where BfL12 differs from other guides is that it integrates with a kite mark system that house builders can use to market their products. This can be seen as a 'carrot' approach, where developers are actively rewarded for good schemes.

A system similar to this could work well in Suffolk, or adapting BfL12 and tying Suffolk Design into the BfL12 partnership for awards etc is worth exploring.



- Very simple
- Easy to use
- Offers an incentive for good design
- Generic

11 CASE STUDY 7;
MEATH RURAL HOUSING DESIGN GUIDE, MEATH, IR

Meath is a county in Ireland where much of the development being undertaken is in very rural locations.

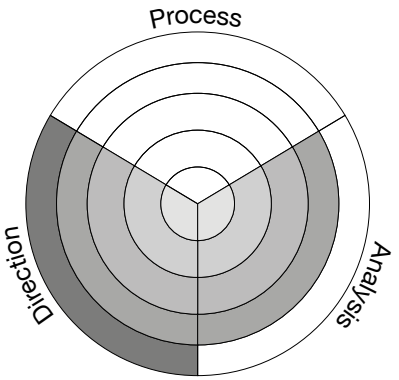
It's design guide differs from UK examples in that it provides very little by way of policy or signposting. Instead, it simply tells you what to do and offers very clear direction as to how to approach specific design issues.

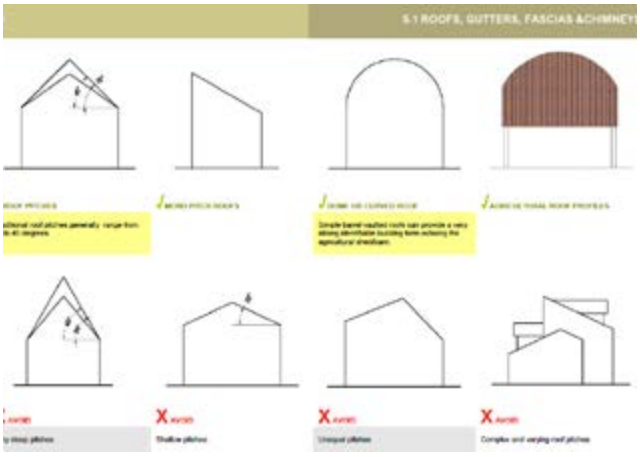
The scope of the document is limited to housing in rural locations, but in doing so it provides a great deal of detail on the kinds of challenges found in the rural areas covered. Being limited in scope means that the information provided is very specific, and sets clear expectations for designers.

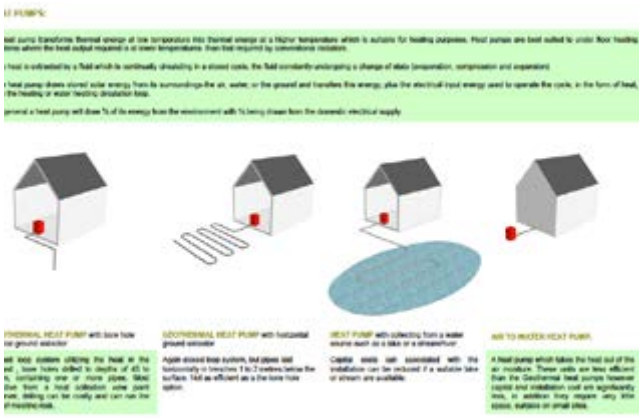
Unlike many of the UK examples, the Meath guide offers advice on sustainable construction and alternative energy. It also covers passive solar gain in detail, which is often a key design opportunity in rural locations.

For Suffolk Design, a section covering these kind of rural design challenges would be useful. If structured properly, the Suffolk Design project could link to existing local analysis and signpost the specifics from place to place, whilst also guiding designers on how to work in rural locations.

Here, a 'live' document on the web would be useful in allowing new analysis to be added as a library is built up.







- Direct and detailed
- Easy to use
- Good graphics
- Limited in scope

12 CASE STUDY 8; ESSEX DESIGN GUIDE, ESSEX

The Essex Design Guide is an ambitious project that uses a web-based platform to present a huge amount of information.

It has a comprehensive scope and offers guidance on how designers and applicants should interact with the planning system. Like Suffolk Design, the guide covers numerous Local Planning Authorities. The section on what each LPA has in place regarded adopted policy is useful and helps designers understand the planning context at a glance.

The Essex Design Guide is more than just guidance, as it integrate design quality initiatives such as the Essex Quality Panel into the overall approach to design.

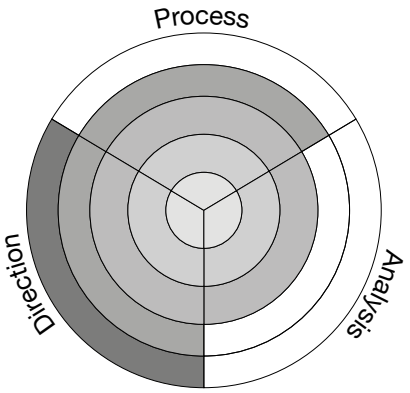
The 'overarching themes' section helps set out the wider design agenda, and then links to relevant sections of the guide to help on the topics outlined.

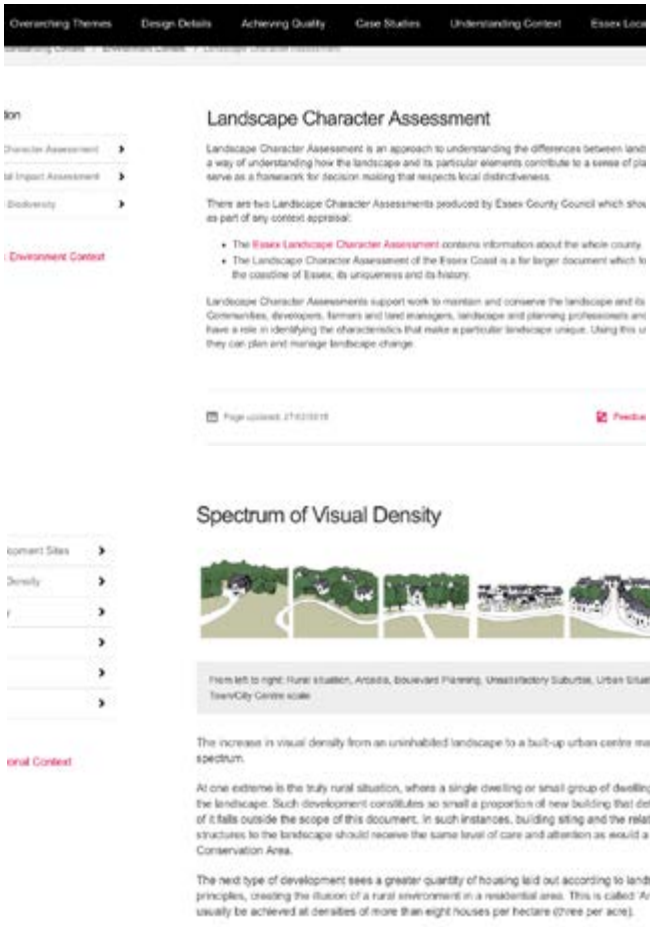
The website is clean and well laid out, but can be difficult to navigate as often users are required to click through several layers to get to information.

The diagrams are clear and easy to understand, and the case studies provide examples of local best practice.

Whilst having so much information would make a printed document overly long and difficult to use, the web interface allows users to access only what they need.

A 'live' document such as this can be built up over time, which could be of special significance to Suffolk Design, where new information can be added over time as new analysis and case studies become available.





- Well-presented and visually attractive
- Clear and concise
- Is written with external users in mind
- Lacks place-specific guidance

13 DISCUSSION; LESSONS FOR SUFFOLK DESIGN

The general picture across the design guidance analysed for this topic paper is that most if not all say much the same thing; the core principles are applicable across geographical areas. This raises the question as to the need for core principles within the Suffolk Design project; if they are just repeats of information elsewhere, are they needed?

Where some add in place-specific guidance or analysis, this comes at a cost in either document length and therefore usability, or in shifting focus from the process of achieving good design. The lesson for the Suffolk Design project here is that comprehensiveness comes at the cost of ease of use; a balance has to be struck.

This brings into consideration the role of design guidance in the built environment. Who is it for, primarily? What is it intended to do? Here, built environment design guidance takes on a complex burden of responsibilities; to act as a statutory planning document, to be usable by Planning Officers and Elected Members for determining planning applications, to act as a guide for those external to the Local Planning Authority such as design teams and land buyers, and to act as a basis for arguing planning appeals and for consideration by legal professionals and the Planning Inspectorate. It would appear from the sampling that most design guides do not try to be all things to all people, rather they identify a key user group and then tailor their message to them. For the Suffolk Design project, this is a key lesson.

The language and tone of within the documents sampled ranges from the more technical, detailed approach often found in adopted planning documents through to a more conversational tone more familiar on websites and in brochures. For Guidance to be effective it must be usable; making the content of the guide accessible and easy to understand is critical.

The use of case studies and examples is commonplace, and these tend to add a great deal to the explanation of good design. 'Do's' and 'don'ts' within the examples is useful to highlight the effects of getting it right. Where diagrams are used, the simpler ones tend to be better at getting to key points across. For example, a diagram showing the relationship between neighbouring houses works better when the houses shown are plain, without architectural style, so as not to distract from the main point.

Web-based guides offer the greatest scope to keep guidance 'live' and responsive to change. It also allows information to be built up over time, and provides the clearest route to linking to external or existing material without repeating it. This could include core design principles that apply anywhere.

Adding in wider design quality initiatives as done by the Essex Design Guide is a good way to integrate design guidance with process-driven approaches to achieving good design. It is also a good way of highlighting the resources available to design teams should they need them.

Missing from the UK design guides is specific guidance on energy, sustainability and modern methods of construction, all of which are likely to be key issues going forward. There is scope for the Suffolk Design project to offer this kind of guidance or to signpost best practice.

From this initial research, is it proposed that the following next steps are undertaken:

Interviews with key stakeholders to understand how effective the guides covered in this paper have been at promoting design quality.

More research into how the various guides were developed, and who was involved and at what stages.

Interviews with key stakeholders to better understand who is using the guides and how.

14 FIVE KEY LESSONS

THE ASSESSMENT UNDERTAKEN FOR THIS PAPER HAS IDENTIFIED FIVE KEY LESSONS FOR THE SUFFOLK DESIGN PROJECT:

LESSON 1: Do not repeat core principles that apply anywhere

There are plenty of existing resources that set out and explain core design principles that apply equally across the country. By not repeating these, it will be possible to keep the Suffolk Design project targeted and locally relevant,

LESSON 2: Balance between comprehensiveness and ease of use

Beyond a certain point, detailed information can start to work against the usability of a design guide, as it is simply too much information to digest. Streamlining the guidance given will make it more effective.

LESSON 3: Identify your audience

The approach to and type of information presented needs to be tailored to the target audience. This will inevitably involve compromising on the roles the Suffolk Design project can fulfil.

LESSON 4: Use accessible language

Using dense, technical language makes using and understanding guidance difficult. Accessible, conversational language makes it more likely that people will actually read what is written.

LESSON 5: Keep examples and diagrams simple

Trying to show too much within one example can confuse the message. Keep diagrams simple and uncluttered, and make sure photographs are clearly captioned so the points being illustrated are understood.